

Analysis of sport sales courses in the sport management curriculum

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Abstract

This paper examined the curriculum posted on program websites of sales education in undergraduate sport management programs in the United States. A sport sales course is offered by 22% of undergraduate sport management programs. Programs with Commission on Sport Management Accreditation (COSMA) accreditation, located in a city, housed in a sport management or leisure department, and programs with larger student enrollments were the most likely to offer a sport sales course. A survey was also utilized better understand of how sport sales courses are being taught and uncover the perceptions of programs not offering sales. The top reasons for adding the class were the demand from the industry for qualified salespeople and a positive employment outlook. Survey results revealed that all courses were taught in a face-to-face environment with an average class size of 27, predominantly taught by a full-time faculty member in sport management. *Selling in the Sport Industry* authored by Pierce et al. was the most commonly used textbook. Respondents from programs not offering the course nearly universally recognized the importance of students demonstrating competence in sales by the time they graduate, and 74% reported covering sales competencies elsewhere in curriculum. Slightly over one-fourth of the programs without a sales course indicated that addition of a required class is likely in the near future. The business school was a likely place to outsource the teaching of sales competencies, with 13% of schools without a sport sales class requiring a professional selling course offered in the business school and 18% offering access to an elective. The most significant obstacle impeding the adoption of sales was the constraint posed by credit hour limits for graduation.

Keywords: sales, sales education, sport sales, curriculum development

1. Background

The sport industry has challenged academia to meet the demand for sales talent as business-to-consumer inside sales teams have grown over the past 15 years in professional and college sports (Popp, Simmons, & McEvoy, 2017). The result has been a fertile supply of entry-level job opportunities for students graduating from sport management programs, as evidenced by data available on the industry's two leading job search sites, *Work in Sports* and *Teamwork Online*. For example, ticket and sponsorship sales positions accounted for 41% of all entry-level positions on *Teamwork Online* in late 2017, representing 24% of all jobs on the site. *Work In Sports* estimated that 53% of job postings require some level of sales experience or competence (Clapp, 2016). As a result, sales positions offer an abundance of entry-level job opportunity and upward mobility for those who are successful in those entry-level positions (Pierce, Popp, & McEvoy, 2017). Employment outcomes are of particular interest to sport management educators who are responsible for and monitor the placement of graduates into the sport industry, especially in an era when state and federal government is using job placement rates in accountability and performance funding metrics (Dougherty & Natow, 2015). Thus, it is increasingly important for sport management programs to leverage industry segments that can bolster placement rates.

We argue that sport management programs should prepare students for sales because new recruits may not receive much training when they arrive on the job. Despite the growth of sales trainers, technology, and coaching, Popp et al. (2017) found that nearly one quarter of sales hires in college athletics receive fewer than two hours of training before making their first sales call. Even more concerning, half received fewer than two hours of monthly ongoing training. The result is that entry-level sport sales positions experience a high rate of turnover. It is estimated

that five out of six entry-level ticket salespeople either choose to leave sales or are let go from their positions (King, 2010). Some of that turnover is an intentional byproduct of the boiler room philosophy, with the inside sales model purposefully weeding out weak salespeople (Kirby, 2013). However, this turnover rate is significantly higher than the 28% annual turnover in other businesses (Fogel, Hoffmeister, Rocco, & Strunk, 2012) and is problematic because there is little continuity between salespeople and the customer from year to year. This lack of continuity comes at a cost because research has shown that organizations benefit from having a more seasoned sales staff. Research in Major League Soccer has shown that salespeople with more than three years of experience generate four times more revenue than first-year salespeople (Mickle, 2010). Therefore, it is important that sport sales educators provide students with high-quality sales education to prepare them to succeed in their first sales position and subsequently leverage the above-average compensation levels and upward mobility that exists in sales (Pierce et al., 2017).

To date, limited data has been available to assess the extent to which sport management education has reacted to meet demand for sales talent. Eagleman and McNary (2010) found that 61 of 227 (26%) undergraduate sport management programs in the United States offered a course in “sales/promotion.” However, since this study was published, the number of undergraduate sport management programs has increased 70% to 386. Anecdotal evidence points toward growth in sport sales education. These signs include the development of a body of scholarly literature in sport sales. Academic scholarship has investigated sales management practices (Popp et al., 2017; Wanless & Judge, 2014), factors influencing sales effectiveness (Pierce, Lee, & Petersen, 2014); social selling practices (Warren, 2016), and the development of a competency model (Pierce & Irwin, 2016). All of the previous factors provided fertile ground for the first

academic textbook devoted to teaching students how to sell within the sport industry (Pierce et al., 2017).

To date no research has examined the extent to which sport management programs have adopted sales education within curricula. Also missing from the literature is an analysis of which programs are adopting sales courses, the administration of sport sales courses, or the attitudes and opinions of programs who have not included sales. As a result, this paper examines the current state of sales education in undergraduate sport management programs in the United States by surveying department chairs, program directors, and sales instructors to understand the administrative approach of programs teaching sales, the opinions and philosophy of those programs not teaching sales, and the challenges facing sport management programs in the delivery of sales education.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Historical development of sport sales in sport management education

The inclusion of sales in the undergraduate sport management curriculum has evolved since the late 1980s from a lack of recognition to being required course in some programs. In the seminal review of sport management curricula in the late 1980s, sales was not identified as an undergraduate course or content area (Parkhouse, 1987). In 1987 the *National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) Task Force on Sport Management* published curricular guidelines for institutions preparing sport management professionals. Sales communication, defined as salesmanship and sales promotion, was identified as a required area of study for which a full course may or may not be available depending on the program's philosophy. In essence, sales communication was identified as something to be covered at some point in the curriculum, but not necessarily by a course devoted exclusively to sales communication (Brassie, 1989). In

1992, the *NASPE-NASSM Joint Task Force on Sport Management Curriculum and Accreditation* developed a competency-based minimum body of knowledge needed for undergraduate programs, which undergirded the development of an accreditation process that was used into the early 2000s. Sales communication was identified as a course that could support the achievement of the core content requirement labeled *Marketing in Sport* (NASPE-NASSM, 1993). Kelley, Beitel, DeSensi, and Blanton (1994) found that practitioners believed all sport managers need to be knowledgeable in “marketing/sales,” which the researchers placed into the “sport merchandising” concentration from the retail sales perspective of selling sport equipment and clothing. Finally, Danylchuk and Boucher (2003) published a Delphi study looking at the future of sport management as an academic discipline. Despite identifying 22 content areas that would be emphasized in the next 10 years, their Delphi study did not uncover sales as a course that would be emphasized in the sport management discipline during that time frame. In sum, much of sport management academia addressed sales within the context of marketing communications, rather than the development of professional selling competencies, which is the basic objective of any sales education (Anderson et al., 2005; Irwin et al., 2007).

Sport management educators did not foresee the increasing emphasis on sales competencies because only recently had sport franchises adopted a staffing model more focused on outbound business-to-consumer sales. Pierce et al. (2017) noted that many sport organizations, historically guilty of marketing myopia and reliance on winning as marketing strategy, saw little need to hire sales staff until the turn of the 21st century when technological advancements and increased competition for the entertainment dollar pushed them to invest in a sales infrastructure. Initially, teams staffed their sales force with inexperienced salespeople and placed them in highly competitive environments with little training assuming the best sellers

would be discovered in a boiler room approach (Popp et al., 2017). This inefficient process led to high turnover and negative perceptions about the nature of sales jobs in the sport industry. As teams began to build their inside sales teams and management infrastructure, it became apparent that qualified talent was needed to fill these roles. However, when the industry turned to sport management programs to procure this talent, it found very few programs preparing students for sales positions (Irwin et al., 2007).

This changed with the pioneering curriculum development and research at the University of Memphis and Baylor University. In the mid-2000s Richard Irwin and Richard Southall developed client-based sales projects at The University of Memphis (Sheffield, 2005). Their work launched a broader dialogue in sport management about the importance of sales in the sport management curricula. Their experiential classroom projects (Sheffield, 2005) and subsequent research culminated in the development of the *Pentagon of Sport Sales Training Model*, described in the next section. The model established a conceptual framework for teaching an experiential sport sales class that partners with a sports property and met the “twenty-first century challenge facing sport management faculty is to make their sport management curriculum more relevant by adding sport sales courses” (Irwin et al., 2007, p. 36). At the same time, Baylor University created the Center for Sports Sponsorship and Sales (S3) major in the Hankamer School of Business in 2004. Upon completion of a core of business and general education courses, S3 students complete 21 hours in the S3 major with courses in professional selling and communication, consumer behavior, marketing research and customer relationship management, and values-based leadership. Students also complete an internship with the option to specialize in ticket sales, strategic partnerships, or analytics with one additional course. More than a decade later, it still stands as the only complete major in sport sales in the United States.

From this new position of awareness and relevance in the mind of sport management educators, sport management programs slowly adopted sport sales courses. Eagleman and McNary's (2010) curricular review of 227 undergraduate sport management programs in the United States provided the only snapshot available to gauge the adoption of sport sales into the sport management curricula. They found that 22% of programs required "sales/promotion" (n = 50) and 4.8% offered it as an elective (n = 11), for 26.8% of programs offering a course in "sales/promotion" (n = 61). However, it is difficult to make direct comparisons to the Eagleman and McNary (2010) study to measure the growth in sales courses because the parameters for how "sales/promotion" courses were coded are not available in their study. The problem with using Eagleman and McNary as a baseline for the growth in sales courses is that the paper did not clarify the extent to which those courses primarily focused on sales, or how much of that number is comprised of courses only focused on promotion. More clearly defining sport sales and assessing the current number of sport sales course adoptions will assist in determining the extent to which sport management education is adapting to employment trends in the sport industry.

Eagleman and McNary (2010) also found that larger institutions were significantly more likely than smaller institutions to offer a sales course. Other institutional characteristics may affect the decision to adopt sales beyond the size of the institution. For example, factors such as proximity to major and minor league sport organizations could affect the ability to create experiential sales projects that is critical to the development of a sport sales course. It is also possible that residential campuses have an easier time asking students to commit hours to making sales calls than non-residential campuses. Another factor that could potentially influence the adoption of sales is whether a program has received accreditation from the Commission on Sport

Management Accreditation (COSMA) because the accreditation and self-study process requires that programs do an extensive study of their curricula.

2.2 Sales education models

Two models set the framework for the development of sport sales courses. First, *Pentagon of Sport Sales Training Model (PSSTM)* (Irwin et al., 2007) advocated for using client-based experiential projects to be included in sport sales courses where students make sales calls for sport organizations. It emphasized five modules:

- 1) embedding students in the client's sales philosophy and culture (philosophy);
- 2) training on the team's product to ensure students know the product (product);
- 3) providing students with prospects that possess a relationship with the team (prospect);
- 4) practicing skills through rehearsal, role-playing, video and audio analysis, and mock sales calls (practice); and
- 5) making the sales call in an authentic environment where performance is measured (performance).

Second, Pierce and Petersen (2015) detailed the steps needed to execute a client-based experiential sales project. It emphasized five steps:

- 1) securing the client and internal support in the university such as computer or classroom space (initiation);
- 2) determining the type of leads students will call and the products that will be sold (project selection);

- 3) selecting the mix of training methods such as lecture, role-playing, mock sales calls, and integration of technology (training);
- 4) establishing positive sales culture in the call center environment (execution); and
- 5) creating a sales competency assessment dashboard to monitor and assess student performance (assessment).

Pierce (in press) found that nearly 60 percent of sport sales courses utilize client-based experiential sales projects as a key component of the course, most often partnering with college athletic departments, minor league teams, and Big Five (Major League Baseball, Major League Soccer, National Football League, National Basketball Association, and National Hockey League) professional sports teams.

Both models place a heavy emphasis on training, which should be designed and delivered by the instructor of the course. The key model to inform the development of sales training content is the *Sport Sales Competency Model* (SSCM) developed by Pierce and Irwin (2016). The model clearly articulates what sellers (students) need to do in order to be successful. Pierce and Irwin (2016) developed the SSCM using the Delphi method with input from sport sales managers. The model presented holistic rubrics to define levels of performance for eight competencies:

- 1) Knowledge and skill development—competencies required in order to acquire a proficient level of knowledge about sales technique, prospects, and product (i.e., possess thorough knowledge of the product being sold);
- 2) Relationship building—competencies required in order to build relationships with prospects (i.e., ability to empathize with the customer);

- 3) Communication skills—competencies required in order to effectively communicate with customers (i.e., possess strong verbal communication skills);
- 4) Opening—competencies required in order to effectively open the sales call (i.e., ability to navigate the gatekeeper and set an appointment with the decision maker);
- 5) Consultative sales approach—competencies required in order to effectively deliver a customized sales pitch tailored to the needs of the customer (i.e., ability to ask the right questions to uncover the needs of the customer, overcome objections, and present solutions);
- 6) Closing—competencies required in order to close the sale (i.e., ability to confirm specific next steps with the customer);
- 7) Maximize each call—competencies required in order to maximize the potential for each call (i.e., ability to upsell and ask for referrals);
- 8) Service and education—competencies required in order to deliver an educated customer to the service team (i.e., ability to educate the customer on how to best utilize their tickets).

Using clearly articulated levels of performance for each competency, the model adds depth and substance to the practice module of the *PSSTM* and the training stage of Pierce and Petersen's (2015) model while also providing an evaluative framework to assess student performance.

In sum, courses that deliver sales education focus on training students to open the sale, conduct a needs analysis by asking questions, present customized solutions, overcome objections, and close the sale. These are the foundational skills needed for students to succeed in any type of entry-level sales environment in sport (Pierce et al., 2017). To alleviate the

ambiguity on what constitutes a sport sales course, this study uses the competency framework developed in Pierce and Irwin (2016). A sport sales course is predominantly devoted to teaching students how to sell within the sport industry by training on prospecting, opening, conducting a needs analysis, presenting solutions, overcoming objections, closing, and servicing after the sale. While the *PSSTM* set the conceptual framework for teaching sales, and Pierce and Petersen (2015) set best practice for integrating a client-based experiential sales project, no study to date has examined the administration of sport sales courses.

3. Research Questions

The following research questions were developed to guide the study.

- 1) What percentage of undergraduate sport management programs in the United States offer a sport sales course in its curriculum?
- 2) Which institutional and program characteristics affect the decision to adopt a sport sales course?
- 3) What trends exist in the way sport sales courses are administered?
- 4) For those programs not offering a course in sport sales, to what extent and in what ways are sales competencies addressed in the curriculum? How likely are these programs to add a course in sport sales?

4. Methodology

These questions were answered using two means of data collection. First, all sport management curricula were examined to determine if a sport sales class was offered. Second, data was collected from a sample of survey respondents to examine how sport sales courses are administered and to understand the plans and perceptions of programs not offering a sport sales

course. Approval for the survey was granted through the Institutional Review Board at the author's campus.

4.1 Population data collection

The first two research questions were answered through collecting publicly available information on sport management programs. All undergraduate sport management programs in the United States were identified using the listing provided by the North American Society for Sport Management on its website (www.nassm.com). University websites were used to examine the program's curriculum at the conclusion of the spring 2017 semester. Course titles were examined to determine whether a program had a sales course. Courses that included the terms *sales*, *selling*, or *revenue generation* somewhere in the title were counted as offering sales. However, an important limitation to the analysis of program curricula is the nature of academic freedom in higher education. Course content can change without an official change to the name or course description in the official university systems like the course catalog. While a full discussion is beyond the scope of this paper, there are several of reasons why course titles and descriptions do not match content actually being delivered. As a result, the survey methods described in the next section were used to enhance the accuracy of the data collected from course titles on university websites. Thus, if a program responded in the survey that they offered a sales course, then they were coded as offering a sales class regardless of the course titles listed on the website.

Other information gathered from the analysis of university websites included departmental affiliation, course number, and whether a sport sales course was required or elective. It is also important to recognize that not all programs may address sales competencies through a course titled and dedicated to sport sales. Some programs may choose to teach sales

competencies through other coursework. For example, programs that reside in or have ties with a business school may offer or require a student to take a course in professional selling (Zaharia, Kaburakis, & Pierce, 2016). Thus, if the analysis of the website and the survey answer indicated the program did not offer a sport sales class, then the university's course catalog was searched to determine if sport management students could access a sales class through the business school. Institutional characteristics were collected from the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education website (carnegieclassifications.iu.edu). COSMA affiliation was determined from the list of accredited schools on the COSMA website.

4.2 Survey data collection and sample

A survey was utilized to gain a better understanding of how sport sales courses are being taught and uncover the perceptions of programs not offering sales. University Internet sites were used to obtain individual e-mail addresses. Responses were collected from undergraduate sport management programs via an online survey system. Potential respondents were sent an e-mail requesting voluntary participation in the study. A link to the survey was included in the e-mail. A follow-up e-mail was sent one week later. The primary target was the undergraduate sport management program director, followed by sales faculty, and finally the department chair. Department chairs were encouraged to forward the survey link to the sport sales instructor, if appropriate. One contact person was identified for each institution, yielding 386 contacts. Twenty institutions were removed due to undeliverable e-mails, yielding a final sample of 366 institutions.

One hundred and four usable questionnaires were returned, for a total response rate of 28.4%. Thirty-six of the 85 (42.4%) programs with sales responded to the survey, and 68 of the 281 (24.2%) programs without sales that received an e-mail responded to the survey. The

majority of the respondents were undergraduate program directors (61.5%), followed by department chairs (22.1%), and sales course instructors (19.2%; table 1). These numbers exceed 100% because a respondent could possess multiple identities.

< Insert Table 1 about here >

Non-response bias was assessed using a chi-square test of independence on relevant variables from the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. These variables included region of the country, size of the university, residential nature of the campus, Carnegie classification, selectivity (ACT scores), whether the school is public or private, department, location, and COSMA accreditation. The chi-square analysis failed to identify any significant relationship between a program's participation in the survey and any of the variables.

4.3 Survey measures

The survey possessed two branches based on how respondents answered the first question: *Do you offer a course that is predominantly devoted to teaching students how to sell within the sport industry (i.e., prospecting, opening, needs analysis, presenting solutions, overcoming objections, closing, upselling, referrals, service after the sale)?* Those responding *yes* received survey questions regarding the administration of the sport sales course.

Administrative questions included method of delivery, whether the course was required, who teaches the course, how often it is offered, course-level, enrollment size, textbook adoption, when the course was added, why the course was added, and whether assessment data is collected in the course. Those who reported *not* having a sales class answered questions regarding the delivery of sales competencies in the curriculum, the likelihood of adding sport sales in the next two years, the classes that need to be added before sales, and how relevant certain challenges are to adding sales to the curriculum.

5. Results

5.1 Sales course adoptions

Eighty-five of the 386 (22%) undergraduate sport management programs offer a course in sport sales. Of the 85 programs offering a sales course, 66 (77.6%) required the course in its program of study, while 19 (22.3%) offered it as an elective or special topics class. Forty-five of the 85 programs offering a sport sales class (53%) have the terms sales, selling, or revenue generation as the singular focus in the title of the class. For example, courses with the title *Revenue Generation in Sport*, *Selling in the Sport Industry*, and *Sales in Sport* were included in this group. The remaining 47% of programs included at least one other topical area in the course title. These other areas included sponsorship (16), promotions (11), marketing (10), and fundraising or development (6). For example, courses with the title *Sport Marketing*, *Sales and Promotion*, and *Sport Sales and Fundraising* were included in this group. The most popular placement for the class was at the 300-level (50.5%), followed by 400-level (36.5%), 200-level (8.2%), and one program offered it at the 100-level.

5.2 Program characteristics

Table 2 displays the frequency counts for the population for each variable from the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education described earlier in the test of non-response bias.

< Insert Table 2 about here >

Logistic regression was employed to explore the probability that a sport management program offered a course in sport sales. For the logistic regression, the *department* variable was reduced from six to four categories. Sport management and leisure were combined, as well as education with liberal arts. A test of the full model versus a model was statistically significant, χ^2

(20, $N = 386$) = 71.2, $p < .001$ (table 3). The model was able to correctly classify 79.5% of the cases and accounted for 26% of the variance (Nagelkerke $R^2 = .26$).

< Insert Table 3 about here >

Employing a .05 criterion of statistical significance, *department*, *COSMA accreditation*, and *location* were significant. The odds ratio for *COSMA* indicates that schools with COSMA accreditation were 3.3 times more likely to offer a sales course than schools without COSMA accreditation. The odds ratio for *department* indicates that sport management programs housed in sport management or leisure (tourism, hospitality, events) departments were 4.3 times more likely than kinesiology, 3.5 times more likely than business, and 18.7 times more likely than education/liberal arts to offer a sales course. The odds ratio for *location* indicates that city-based sport management programs are 3.4 times more likely than programs located in town or remote locations. Results from the survey support the location finding, as programs with sales courses ($M = 65.72$, $SD = 63.82$) were located significantly closer in miles to a Big Five professional sports team than programs not offering a course ($M = 93.46$, $SD = 94.48$), $t(102) = 2.0$, $p = .049$. Finally, survey results indicated that the size of the sport management program impacted the adoption of a sales course, as programs offering a course ($M = 161.22$, $SD = 100.56$) enrolled more students than those not offering a sales course ($M = 105.44$, $SD = 84.59$), $t(102) = 2.9$, $p = .003$.

5.3 Sales course administration

Responses were received from 36 programs offering a sales course (34.6% of survey respondents). The most common reason cited for adding the class was the demand from the industry for qualified salespeople (73.5%), followed closely by the positive employment outlook for students pursuing jobs in sales with respect to job opportunity, upward mobility, and salary

(52.9%). All respondents reported offering the sales course in a face-to-face environment. The mean class size was 27 students ($SD = 13$) with 94% of programs enrolling less than 40 students per class. The class was predominantly taught by a full-time faculty member in sport management (77.8%), offered at the 300-level (44.4%), and offered once per year (58.3%). The most prevalent required textbook, adopted by 36.1% of the sample, was *Selling in the Sport Industry* (2017) authored by Pierce et al. Forty-four percent of programs collect data in the sales class to complete student learning outcome assessments.

< Insert Table 4 about here >

5.4 Programs without a sales class

Sixty-eight respondents indicated a sport sales course was not offered in their program (65.4% of survey respondents). Even though a sales class was not offered in these programs, respondents nearly universally recognized the importance of students demonstrating competence in sales by the time they graduate. In fact, 97% of respondents indicated that it was at least moderately important for students to do so, including 29.4% believing it was extremely important and 38.2% believing it was very important. Without a sport sales class, sport management programs relied on other means to address sales competencies. In fact, 73.5% reported that sales competencies are covered elsewhere in the student's plan of study, while only 26.5% indicated sales competencies are not addressed anywhere in the curriculum. Within the sport management curriculum, the most common placement of sales competencies was clearly in sport marketing (37), followed distantly by event/facility management (7) sport finance (6), and the introductory course (4). Nine of the 68 programs (13.2%) reported addressing sales by requiring a professional selling course offered in the business school. For the 301 programs that

did not offer a sport sales class, 53 (17.6%) offered access to a sales course through the business school that could be accessed by students as an elective within their program of study.

Two thirds ($n = 45$) of programs without sales indicated there would be faculty discussions in the next year about adding a sales course. Of these 45 programs, 41 believed it was likely they would adopt either a required or an elective/topics sales class in the curriculum. Specifically, 18 programs indicated it was likely that sport sales would be required in the curriculum in the near future and 23 believed an elective or special topics class was likely. In contrast, 23 programs indicated it was unlikely faculty discussions would take place about adding sales, and all 23 of these programs believed it was unlikely sales would be added to the curriculum.

< Insert Table 5 about here >

The most relevant obstacle impeding the growth of sales according to the 68 respondents from programs without a sales program is the constraint posed by credit hour limits for graduation ($M = 1.94$, $SD = .84$). When asked what class should be added before a sales class is added, 18 respondents indicated sales was the next course to be added. No clear trend emerged from the remainder of the responses, but a course in sport analytics was identified by three respondents. The second most relevant challenge is finding a qualified instructor to teach the class ($M = 2.47$, $SD = .99$) with 53% of respondents noting this was a relevant challenge for their program.

< Insert Table 6 about here >

A MANOVA was conducted on each of these questions to determine if differences existed between programs who are likely to adopt a sales course and those who are not. The multivariate test was significant, $F(7, 59) = 342.0$, Wilks' Lambda = .024. Two univariate

follow-up tests were significant. Programs not likely to add sales ($M = 2.81$, $SE = .92$) felt sales did not fit the mission of the program more so than those likely to add sales ($M = 3.28$, $SE = .85$), $F = 4.43$, $p = .039$. Also, programs unlikely to adopt sales ($M = 1.59$, $SE = .16$) believed it was harder to increase the number of credit hours than those who saw sales course adoption as likely ($M = 2.18$, $SE = .13$), $F = 5.47$, $p = .005$.

6. Discussion

The results of this study could inform decision-making for programs who already offer a sport sales course and for those considering its adoption in the near future. The inclusion of sport sales courses and competencies in the curriculum benefit students seeking to leverage the significant quantity of entry-level positions, above-average compensation levels, and upward mobility for those successful in those entry-level positions. Sport sales courses offer programs a close link with sales manager seeking talent to fill available positions. As pockets of the industry transition to a more strategic and focused hiring process to find qualified sales talent (Burrows, 2017; Popp et al., 2017), sport management programs stand poised to deliver salespeople that can succeed and advance in the industry.

6.1 Sales course adoptions

The examination of course offerings in 386 undergraduate sport management programs in the United States revealed that 22% ($n = 85$) of programs offer a course in sport sales. The 22% adoption rate in sport management programs is similar to the 21% adoption rate in AACSB-accredited business schools (Fogel et al., 2012). The results of the survey show that the majority of courses have been developed since the publication of the *PSSTM* in 2007. Some programs have added a course devoted exclusively to sales, as evidenced by the 53% of sales courses with titles specifically devoted to sales or revenue generation. The other 47% of sales courses include

another topic like marketing, promotion, fundraising, or sponsorship in the title of the course. It is apparent that sales is still commonly regarded as a subset of a larger content area within the curriculum as it is common to have other topics within marketing covered alongside the sales process.

Compared to the results of the Eagleman and McNary (2010) study, the number of sport sales courses has grown 39% from 61 courses in 2010 to 85 courses in 2017, an average of three courses added per year. However, because only 15% of sport management programs launched since 2010 included sport sales in the curriculum (24 of 159) and the number of sport management programs has increased by 70% at the same time (from 227 to 386), the percentage of programs offering a sport sales course decreased from 27% to 22% between 2010 and 2018. Stated differently, between 2010 and 2018, an average of 20 sport management programs have been added each year compared to three sport sales courses. Simply put, the adoption of sport sales courses has not kept pace with the increase in sport management programs despite employment data pointing toward entry-level job opportunity.

However, there was also evidence to support the position that there will be an increase in sales courses added annually compared to recent years. Two thirds of the programs without a sales course indicated program faculty would be engaging in discussions about adding a sales course, with nearly all of those programs believing a sales course adoption was likely. Beyond this, over one quarter of the programs without a sales course indicated that the addition of a required class is likely in the near future, and one third believed an elective or special topics class was likely to be added. Given these figures, it stands to reason that the rate of sales course adoption will exceed the rate of three programs per year. The recent availability of a sport sales textbook to support faculty who are teaching students how to sell should facilitate the adoption

of sales classes. This should alleviate the textbook concern identified by one respondent who noted, “One of our big challenges was locating appropriate resources to utilize within the course since there is a lack of academic resources that are specifically focused on sales in sport.”

Programs looking to justify the addition of a sport sales course can look to the two key rationales used by programs that added a sales course. The most common reason cited for adding the class was the demand from the industry for qualified salespeople, followed closely by the positive employment outlook for students pursuing jobs in sales with respect to job opportunity, upward mobility, and salary. Not only do entry-level sales positions exist in large quantity in college and professional sports, but those who are talented and successful in sales can also climb the organizational chart faster in sales than in other departments (Pierce et al., 2017). Beyond the jobs in college and pro sports, there are many other sales positions in the sport industry in media advertising, box office management, sporting goods, customer service, retail membership sales, and booking events (Pierce, Petersen, Clavio, & Meadows, 2012). It is important to also keep in mind that sales is a skill set that transcends types of organizations and industries and can be put to good use by students regardless of their job title.

With respect to which programs have adopted a sales course, several trends emerged. First, programs housed in a sport management or leisure (i.e., tourism) department were significantly more likely to offer a sales course. Programs housed in sport management or leisure departments likely have an easier time making curricular changes than those housed in areas outside the discipline in business, kinesiology, and education. Second, programs with COSMA accreditation were three times more likely to offer sales than non-COSMA schools. In fact, 46% of COSMA-accredited programs offered sales compared to 20% of non-COSMA schools. The assessment and strategic planning process that occurs in COSMA-accredited

schools likely drives discussions that allow the faculty to “continually evaluate and adapt curricula to maximize student benefits and keep pace with the demands of the dynamic sport industry in which students are seeking to gain employment” (Braunstein-Minkove & DeLuca, 2015, p. 21). Third, schools located in cities and closer to Big Five professional sports teams were more likely to adopt sales courses. Programs residing in a city were three times more likely to offer sales than those in town/remote locations, and programs with sales averaged 63 miles from the closest Big Five team compared to 93 miles for those not offering a sales course. Managing a sales project is significantly easier when students and faculty can access the resources of partnering organizations. Access to sales trainers, guest speakers, facilities, and jobs is enhanced for those programs situated closer to professional teams. Sales programs residing in town/remote locations may find it more challenging to create relevant experiential sales experiences that are the hallmark of sales courses (Pierce, in press). Finally, larger programs were more likely to offer sales, especially those with over 150 students enrolled. The same trend was nearly significant for institutional size as well, but the result was insignificant at $p = .06$. It appears that larger programs have more faculty and resources to be able to offer an emerging course like sales that does not fit the traditional paradigm of a course required in the sport management curriculum.

While sales has gained traction in recent years, it is prudent to note that 27% of programs without a sales course do not provide students with exposure to sales. If applied to the population, there are approximately 80 sport management programs that do not cover sales at any point during a student’s program of study. Programs not addressing sales in the curriculum included a small group of three programs in the survey that believed sales did not fit the mission of the program and that sales was not perceived as a real class by the faculty. In fact, programs

that were unlikely to adopt sales found lack of fit to mission to be a more significant than those who were likely to adopt a sales course. These sentiments are captured cogently by the following response from a program director at a small, liberal-arts institution:

Our Sport Administration degree does not in any way propose that students will be salespeople when they graduate from our program. Sales is not a part of our Sport Administration Program. That requires an entirely different set of personnel, people, and business skills which we do not promote nor claim to prepare students for, in our program.

6.2 Sales competencies across the curriculum

Sport sales competencies can be infused into any broad-based sport management program even if a sport sales course is not specifically offered. Sport management educators can use different approaches to infuse sales into the curriculum. Programs yet to adopt a sales course nearly universally agreed it is important for students to demonstrate sales competencies. In fact, 97% of programs that do not offer a sport sales course view sales competencies as at least moderately important for students to acquire before graduation. As a result, many programs have elected to address sales competence through other courses in the curriculum. One way to approach this is by outsourcing the course to the business school. Currently 18% of sport management programs that do not offer a sport sales class offer access to a sales course through the business school.

The other approach is to infuse sales competencies across the sport management curriculum. This is particularly relevant for sport management program directors facing budgetary and credit hour constraints. The most significant challenge to adding a sales course is the difficulty in adding credit hours in the major. Bachelor degree requirements for most

programs at four-year institutions are limited to 120 credit hours through the actions of accrediting bodies and state legislatures (Johnson, Reidy, Droll, & LeMon, 2012). As a result, the decision to add a new course often comes at the expense of an existing course within the major, or reducing the elective credits available for students to pursue additional certificates and minors. It can be difficult to justify removing another course to add a sales course to the curriculum. This presents a challenge for sport management faculty to keep abreast of industry trends and deliver relevant content throughout the curriculum. The credit hour challenge was felt acutely by those programs unlikely to add sales, as they rated it as a more significant challenge than those programs likely to add sales. One respondent who had already adopted sales noted credit hour limitations was the biggest hurdle to overcome: “Our biggest challenge was managing overall credit hours required for the degree. We did not want to inflate credit hours any further, and had to decide what to cut.” Related to the issue of credit hour inflexibility is the issue of budget and resources. One respondent from a large, research-intensive public institution noted,

We know the content is important, but we do not have the resources to add the course to the required curriculum . . . We hesitate to make a course a required course if we don’t have a full-time faculty to teach it. It is not that one of our faculty does not have the knowledge to teach sales, but we are assigned too many other classes and someone is usually on an overload anyway. It comes down to budget—not desire, interest, importance, or knowledge.

Finally, a program director at a program with 180 sport management students and a small faculty said,

We have a relatively small number of faculty relative to teaching loads and number of students so had to get buy-in from other faculty members that sales was the course that should be added (ahead of courses in media relations, international sport, sport in higher ed, etc.).

For these programs, integrating sales competencies across the curriculum is critical.

While sport marketing is the most commonly reported place for sales to be covered, sales competencies can be integrated in other courses throughout the curriculum. Courses already on the books with titles like marketing, promotion, public relations sponsorship, fundraising, communication, finance, and management could be used as a vehicle to deliver sales content and allow students to demonstrate certain sales competencies. For example, Warren (2016) found that top-performing salespeople use social selling significantly more than those who do not. Thus, a public relations or communications class that focuses on writing and content creation could be a course in which students demonstrate the ability to create content for social selling. Another option is to deconstruct the key components to generating revenue given current technological trends, and bring that content under the banner of a course focused on revenue generation. Such a course could repackage content from courses like finance, marketing, sales, and analytics into a course that focuses on how to generate revenue in the sport industry. A course focused on fundraising could be another location for the inclusion of sales competencies. The competencies of prospecting, relationship building, communication skills, and service after the sale (stewardship) are all important to the success of development officers (Wanless, Pierce, Martinez, Lawrence-Benedict, & Kopka, 2017). The challenge for program directors and faculty is to determine the best way to integrate sales competence when a course is not specifically devoted to sales given the program's faculty expertise and culture.

6.3 Sales course administration

For programs that have adopted a sales course, face-to-face was the delivery method of choice for all the programs, and nearly all programs have adopted the sales course as an upper-level course within the curriculum (300- or 400-level). The focus on face-to-face as the delivery method is similar to professional selling courses in business schools. Deeter-Schmelz and Kennedy (2011) found that “schools with sales programs almost exclusively utilize face-to-face delivery of sales courses over other delivery formats” (p. 70). With respect to class size, nearly all of the programs are in line with Michaels and Marshall’s (2002) recommendation that sales courses be less than 36 students. The interpersonal and experiential nature of sales education explain the face-to-face delivery with small class sizes.

A full-time faculty member in sport management predominantly teaches sport sales courses. This should be comforting to the 53% of respondents without a sales course who believed it would be difficult to find a qualified instructor to teach the class. Difficulty in finding tenure-track faculty members to teach the course is not an unfounded fear, as past research on sales courses in business schools have noted a similar concern since “most academicians feel uncomfortable teaching [sales] unless they have actually ‘walked the sales walk’ in their own careers” (Michaels & Marshall, 2002, p. 2). If a sport management faculty member is not able or willing to teach the course, an adjunct from the sport industry with a background in sales is likely the next best option. The university’s athletic department or a professional sports team in the region should supply fertile ground for recruiting an adjunct to teach the course. When this occurs, the adjunct should facilitate the development of an experiential sales project with their organization.

6.4 Pedagogical implications

Future technological innovation and disruption in business practices will shape the future of sport sales education. Kirby (2017) believes that “sport sales fundamentals have become a relic, unequipped for the modern, digital age” (p. 36). He argues the model of having entry-level salespeople in their early 20s who rarely use their smartphone for phone calls make 100 scripted, outbound calls per day in a boiler room environment is a top-down indoctrination structure that does not provide innovation or creative thinking. According to Kirby, this model stands in stark contrast to the success of e-retailing sites like Amazon in the secondary ticket market and diminishes the value of millennial sales reps reaching their generation of consumers. Kirby’s critique is timely given how technology can alter the ways in which people prefer to use and consume the sport product. Rapid advances in technology are changing the ways in which fans want to receive information about their favorite sports teams and experiences. Rapid change like this will require sport management educators to think more holistically across the curriculum to best prepare future leaders.

Given this context of technological change and innovation, it is important for sport sales educators to stay abreast of current technological trends, teach students to empathize with how people use technology to enhance their experience, and focus on the fundamentals of consultative selling that are always needed regardless of time or place. First, educators need to stay abreast on current trends in pricing, packaging, and use of technology. Contemporary sport sales classes should examine trends like virtual reality, augmented reality, social selling, and subscription pricing. Second, getting students to empathize with the fan sets the stage for them to see larger trends in the fan experience. Sport sales education is more than just teaching students to ask a prescriptive list of questions when talking to someone; it’s about teaching students how to empathize with fans in a way that uncovers the benefit they obtain from

attending the experience, then determining and presenting the value proposition to the customer. Once the fan attends, the ability to build rapport through conversation with the customer yields important information about areas of satisfaction and pain points, which when put together with the conversations of other salespeople should yield actionable insights about the fan experience. These insights can even lead to new product and experience innovation, preparing students for management roles and beyond. Third, even as inside sales teams transition their work flow to more digital-friendly tactics, the fundamental competencies of consultative selling are always needed in any sort of sales environment. For example, social sellers use LinkedIn to start relationships, and then used face-to-face appointments or phone calls to make the sales pitch (Warren, 2016). Thus, the digital technology sets up the opportunity to sell in a “traditional” way.

6.5 Limitations

This study has two key limitations. First, drawing conclusions on the growth of sales programs is limited by the potential differences in how sales classes were categorized in the Eagleman and McNary study and this study. While the current study specifically dictated how a sales class was categorized, no such framework was provided in the Eagleman and McNary study. As a result, the same coding scheme used in this study, if applied to the data collected in 2010, may have yielded different results. Second, the response rate was lower than the ideal response rate for programs with sales given the fact there were only 85 members of the population, which decreased the power of statistical tests.

7. Conclusion

A sport sales course is offered by 22% of undergraduate sport management programs in the United States, with 53% of those programs using the terms sales, selling, or revenue

generation as the singular focus in the course title. The course is required by 78% of programs offering it and offered as an elective by 22%. Programs with Commission on Sport Management Accreditation (COSMA) accreditation, located in a city, housed in a sport management or leisure department, and programs with larger student enrollments were the most likely to offer a sport sales course. The most common reason cited for adding the class was the demand from the industry for qualified salespeople, followed closely by the positive employment outlook for students pursuing jobs in sales with respect to job opportunity, upward mobility, and salary. Survey results revealed that all courses were taught in a face-to-face environment with an average class size of 27, predominantly taught by a full-time faculty member in sport management. The most commonly used textbook was *Selling in the Sport Industry* authored by Pierce et al.

Survey respondents from programs not offering the course nearly universally recognized the importance of students demonstrating competence in sales by the time they graduate, and 74% reported that sales competencies are covered elsewhere in the student's plan of study. The business school was a likely place to outsource the teaching of sales competencies, with 13% of schools without a sport sales class requiring a professional selling course offered in the business school and 18% offering access to an elective. Only 26.5% of programs not offering sales reported that sales competencies are not addressed anywhere in the curriculum. The most relevant obstacle impeding the adoption of sales by programs without a course was the constraint posed by credit hour limits for graduation.

While sales education has reached a stage of legitimacy within sport management, the meager adoption of sport sales courses at the rate of three per year makes it questionable as to whether the discipline will meet the industry's need for sales talent. Despite employment data

pointing toward entry-level job opportunity, the percentage of programs offering sales has not kept pace with the addition of new programs and has actually dropped from 27% to 22% over the past eight years. However, two thirds of the programs that do not offer a sport sales course are actively discussing the adoption of sales and one quarter believe the adoption of a sales course is likely in the near future. As new sport sales courses are launched and sales education is redesigned to adapt to technological change and innovation, the skill set needed by sports properties should be central to the development of student learning outcomes.

Table 1
Sample Characteristics

Characteristic	Sales Course		No Sales Course		Total	
	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.
Sales Course	36	34.6%	68	65.4%	104	100%
Respondent						
Department Chair	3	8.3%	20	29.4%	23	22.1%
Sport Management Director	18	50.0%	48	69.6%	64	61.5%
Sales instructor	20	55.6%	0	0%	20	19.2%
Accreditation						
COSMA	4	11.1%	5	7.4%	9	8.7%
Business	7	19.5%	21	26.7%	28	26.9%
Other	0	0%	3	4.4%	3	2.9%
None	25	69.4%	39	61.5%	64	61.5%
Program Enrollment						
< 50	4	11.1%	18	26.5%	22	21.1%
51–100	7	19.4%	27	39.7%	34	32.7%
101–150	10	27.8%	14	20.6%	24	23.1%
> 151	15	41.7%	9	13.2%	24	23.1%

Table 2

Population Characteristics

Characteristics	Sales Course		No Sales Course		Total	
	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.
Sales Course	85	22.0%	301	78.0%	386	100%
Location						
City	48	56.5%	119	39.5%	167	43.3%
Suburb	24	28.2%	74	24.6%	98	25.4%
Town/Rural	13	15.3%	108	35.9%	121	31.3%
Department						
Sport Management & Leisure	27	32.1%	28	9.3%	55	14.3%
Kinesiology & Health	32	38.1%	131	43.5%	163	42.3%
Business	23	27.4%	115	38.2%	138	35.8%
Education & Lib Arts	2	2.4%	27	9.0%	29	7.5%
COSMA						
Accredited	13	15.5%	15	5.0%	28	7.3%
Not accredited	72	84.5%	286	95.0%	358	92.7%
Selectivity						
Most selective	27	31.8%	56	18.6%	83	21.5%
Selective	41	48.2%	152	50.5%	193	50.0%
Inclusive	17	20.0%	93	30.9%	110	28.5%
Region						
Southeast	27	31.8%	82	27.2%	109	28.2%
New England	7	8.2%	31	10.3%	38	9.8%
Mid-East	18	21.2%	45	15.0%	63	16.3%
Great Lakes	21	24.7%	54	17.9%	75	19.4%
Plains	7	8.2%	43	14.3%	50	13.0%
West	5	5.9%	46	15.3%	51	13.2%
Control						
Public	38	44.7%	115	38.2%	153	39.6%
Private	47	55.3%	186	61.8%	233	60.4%
Residential						
Highly residential	30	35.3%	107	35.5%	137	35.5%
Primarily residential	35	41.2%	138	45.8%	173	44.8%
Non-residential	20	23.9%	56	18.6%	76	19.7%
Size						
Large	33	38.8%	71	23.6%	104	26.9%
Medium	31	36.5%	90	29.9%	121	31.3%
Small	21	24.7%	140	46.5%	161	41.7%
Carnegie Classification						
Doctoral	32	37.6%	75	24.9%	107	27.7%
Masters	38	44.7%	151	50.2%	189	49.0%
Baccalaureate	15	17.6%	75	24.9%	90	23.3%

Table 3

Logistic Regression Predicting Sales Course

Predictor	β	Wald	p	Odds Ratio
Carnegie		1.771	.413	
Size		5.426	.066	
Residential		.876	.645	
Control (Public or Private)		.005	.942	
Region		9.786	.082	
Selectivity		.603	.740	
COSMA	1.182	6.570	.010	3.260
Department (Sport Management*)		21.271	.000	
Kinesiology/Health	1.477	14.423	.000	4.381
Business	1.266	9.843	.002	3.547
Education/Liberal Art	2.927	12.248	.001	18.676
Location (City*)		8.694	.013	
Suburb	.267	.603	.437	
Town & Remote	1.239	8.693	.001	3.452

* denotes reference group comparison. For example, sport management departments were 4.3 times more likely than kinesiology/health departments to offer a sport sales course.

Table 4

Sales Course Administration (Survey Results)

Survey Item	N	Pct.
Course Level (n = 36)		
200-level	8	22.2%
300-level	16	44.4%
400-level	12	33.3%
Course Delivery (n = 36)		
Face-to-Face	36	100%
Requirement (n = 36)		
Required	29	80.6%
Elective	7	19.4%
Instructor (n = 36)		
Course Enrollment (n = 36)		
10–19 students	10	27.9%
20–29 students	10	27.9%
30–39 students	11	30.6%
Greater than 40 students	2	5.6%
Instructor (n = 36)		
Full-time sport management	28	77.8%
Full-time not sport management	1	2.8%
Adjunct or part-time with a teaching role	2	5.6%
Adjunct or part-time from the industry	5	13.9%
Frequency of Offering (n = 36)		
Once per year	21	58.3%
Twice per year	10	27.8%
Three times per year	2	5.6%
Four times per year	3	8.3%
Textbook (n = 36)		
<i>Selling in the Sport Industry</i> (2017)	13	36.1%
Custom materials	5	13.9%
Other	5	13.9%
<i>Sport Promotion and Sales Management</i> (2008)	4	11.1%
A sport marketing text	3	8.3%
No book is used	3	8.3%
<i>The Ultimate Toolkit</i> (2013)	2	5.6%
A professional selling textbook	1	2.8%
Student Learning Outcomes (n = 34)		
Sales class used in assessment plan	15	44.1%
Sales class not used in assessment plan	19	55.9%
Sales Course Added to Curriculum (n = 34)		
Prior to 2010	15	44.1%
2011–2014	9	26.5%
2015–2017	10	29.4%

Rationale for Adding (n = 34)

Demand from the industry for qualified salespeople	25	73.5%
Positive employment outlook	18	52.9%
Received internal funding	2	5.9%

Table 5

Likelihood of Discussing and Adding Sport Sales Course

	Likely to add required course	Likely to add elective	Unlikely to add course	Total
Likely to discuss	18	23	4	45
Unlikely to discuss	0	0	23	23
Total	18	23	27	68

Table 6

Key Challenges Facing the Adoption of Sales

Challenge	Extremely relevant (1)	Somewhat Relevant (2)	Somewhat irrelevant (3)	Extremely irrelevant (4)	Total	M	SD
Hard to increase the number of credit hours in the major	23	29	13	3	68	1.94	.84
Difficult to find a qualified instructor to teach the class	12	24	20	12	68	2.47	.99
Full-time faculty are hesitant to teach the class	8	16	23	21	68	2.84	1.0
Other departments teach sales and can block SM from adding a sales course	6	17	25	20	68	2.87	.94
Sales doesn't fit the mission or vision of our program	3	15	22	27	67	3.09	.90
Not sure what textbook to use	2	13	20	33	68	3.24	.87
Sales is not perceived as a "real class" by the faculty	1	7	26	34	68	3.37	.73

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